CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

The power of mass media in this day and age is unquestionable. It plays a huge role in shaping how society think and act as it is often the only source of information to most of us. The media reflects our opinion to gain our trust, as well as it shapes said opinion with its power of owning and distributing information (Nikolova, 2020). The main purpose of mass media is to provide information, entertainment and advertisement (Nikolova, 2020), be it from newspaper, radio, television, or film.

Film has long been one of the most global forms of entertainment to date as it has become a multi-billion industry. In 2018 alone, the global film industry grasped a total revenue of $136 billion (ibisworld.com). Beyond a mere form of entertainment, film actually delivers meaningful messages and information through visuals, sound, as well as text. Film reflects society and so does it influence society by changes of representation from time to time, challenging the viewers'morals and opinions (Fairman, 2016). In some ways, it's easy to say that film can either be a reflection or even a critique to reality.

According to Dwight E. Brooks and Lisa P. Hebert (2006), the media ultimately becomes the central representation of what our social realities look like. Thus, it is important to pay attention what messages and representations do said media carry, especially through film. One of the most vivid representations brought

by the media that has real life consequences are that of gender. Media's representation of gender affects our views on gender and how it should be expressed even starting when we are of a very young age. The media provide an idea of what is and is not appropriate examples for male or female behavior according to cultural beliefs, which turns into its audiences' understanding of gender (Reinhard et. al, 2017).

Before going further, the term gender itself is often misunderstood. There is an overlooked difference in defining gender and sex. Sex refers to one's genitalia, chromosome, and physical attributes (Lindqvist et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the term gender associates more with social aspects in relation to behavior, personality, as well as expressions which is conventionally labeled as feminine or masculine (Reisner et al., 2015). According to Killerman (2014), gender itself should be seen as a continuum rather than a binary option.

Along with the understanding of gender, comes what is described by Eagly (2009), gender roles, which are beliefs shared by society which apply to individuals based on their socially identified sex. Furthermore, the descriptive aspects of said gender roles can be conceptualized as stereotypes which depict attributes which are ascribed to a certain group of people (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989).

Gender stereotypes portrayed in the media reinforce the myth that all men are strong and all women are weak (Beasley, 2020). In most cultures, there are only two admitted genders: men and women (Fournier, 2020) with stereotypes along the

lines of: men are stoic, strong, hard workers, protectors, meanwhile women are gentle, passive, emotional, and motherly (Fournier, 2020).

The issue with these stereotypical gender roles is that it can be oppressive and harmful. At a general example, men cannot express being gentle and nurturing because it is too "feminine" the same way women cannot be athletic and stoic because it would make her less of a girl (Fournier,2020). People who do not conform to these gender stereotypes that include the way to dress, talk, or even love others, will be belittled, bullied, or worse. To an extreme extent, upholding gender conformity causes violence and death. Trans women are assaulted and killed solely for being trans. Gay men and women are also assaulted for not being attracted to the opposite gender which is seen as "normal" by the gender conforming society (Fournier, 2020).

In a 2015 U.S Transgender Survey involving 27.715 respondents from all fifty states, recorded that 46% of them were verbally harassed in the past year (vawnet.org, 2016). One in ten were physically attacked, 47% were sexually assaulted, and more than half (54%) non-binary or non-gender-conforming individuals experienced domestic abuse. All of these cases occurred solely on the basis of their gender. In a more recent study done by *The Trevor Project* involving 40.000 respondents aged 13 to 24, shows 40% of LGBTQ or non-gender-conforming youths have considered suicide in the last year (Scott, 2020). The survey done from December 2019 to March 2020 also provide detailed stories of individuals who have went through harsh bullying and assault simply because they

do not *fit* in the box of what it means to be man or woman (Scott,2020). Many of the stories involve non-binary individuals, girls who dress masculine or have a masculine figure, boys who like dressing feminine or wearing makeup.

Another cross-national study on gender differences in suicide intent done in 2017 involving 5121 participants, show that suicide appears to be a male phenomenon, as death rates from suicide are four to five times higher for men than it is for women (Freeman, et al., 2017). On the other hand, women demonstrate a higher rate of suicide attempts by 20 times. Along with a number of other researchers, Freeman (2017) refers to this phenomenon as the gender paradox of suicidal behavior. This research also reveals that women are less likely to commit suicide because most likely show desire to communicate distress (Freeman, 2020). In relation to gender stereotypes, as stated previously, men are expected to be tough, meanwhile women being emotional is widely accepted. These pressures males to refuse seeking help because it is not 'masculine' (Freeman, 2020).

The entertaining media have a strong contribution to stereotypical gender roles as it amplifies the ideas which dictate how one should express their gender. Many studies on gender roles in the media reveal that male and female characters are actually portrayed in a different manner one way or another.

> "Typically, men are portrayed as active, adventurous, powerful, sexually aggressive and largely uninvolved in human relationships. Just as 'consistent with cultural views of gender are depictions of women as sex objects who are usually young, thin beautiful, passive, dependent, and often incompetent and dumb. Female characters devote their primary energies to improving their appearances and taking care of homes and people. Because media pervade our lives, the ways they misrepresent genders may distort how we see our- selves and what we perceive as normal and desirable for men and women." (Wood, p.32, 1994)

Although not many, a number of heroin characters arise in movies such as the Hunger Games, Wonder Woman, and Captain Marvel show that women are not necessarily timid, passive, and weak beings. One of the most recent movies with an interesting representation of gender is Enola Holmes.

Among many others, one of the most impactful novel based movies are Sherlock Holmes and the Sherlock Holmes universe. The latest film of the Sherlock Holmes franchise is" Enola Holmes" which is a movie that takes a new perspective that follows the adventures of Sherlock Holmes' sister, Enola. Another fresh perspective that the movie seems to offer is the portrayal of gender roles. Movies, especially following the genre of action, mystery, or drama, contribute largely to society's idea on the assignment of roles to particular genders.

The movie Enola Holmes is unique because not only does it place women as the "hero", but it also places the man as the "damsel in distress". This research is interested in exploring such portrayal through a semiotic analysis, as it depicts how media can be used as a tool to tackle unequal societal representation through the work of details of how certain roles are assigned to a certain gender through dialogue, behavior, and also each character's thought process.

1.2. Identification of Problem

Over exaggerated gender portrayals of how women are defined by her femininity and men by their masculinity, directly harm those who are illustrated to be lesser than since it affects how society thinks and treats the poorly portrayed gender. In other ways, as the media keep amplifying the belief that one's gender identity naturally or automatically defines or dictate how one expresses their gender, it creates the idea that once an individual expresses it differently than expected, he, she or they must be isolated from society. This harms both women and men. Women are most likely to be portrayed as mothers, as the nurturer, as a house wife all while also being over sexualized and being seen as objects — the supporting character. Meanwhile men are most often portrayed as the breadwinners, the hero, the tough guy — the main character.

These stereotypical portrayals of gender are not harmless. When the media continue to portray women as helpless and submissive, in reality they will also continue to be treated as less than (Beasley, 2020). This will indeed affect women's position in education, career, and even in personal relationships. Also, by constantly sexualizing women, it becomes normalized, thus leading to more instances of sexual abuse and violence against women (Beasley, 2020).

Other than disadvantaging women, although it may seem less harmful, the way media often portrays men also has its downsides. Popular films such as Robocop (1987), Die Hard (1988), and the Spider-man series (2002, 2004, and 2007) all create the image of men having to embody extreme masculinity where men are portrayed as tough, aggressive, unafraid, violent, and carries zero

femininity (Wood, 1994). Partciularly Spiderman, in all three movies of its 3 series, the female character, Mary Jane, always becomes the supporting actress which role is simply to be taken as hostage where Spiderman saves her and save the day. Movies such as these, present the image of men disallows them to become weak and vulnerable since it encourages men to always be expected to become the hero and save the day while expressing extreme masculinity, otherwise they too, become viewed as lesser than.

As women are belittled if they even think out of the ordinary ideology of what they are expected to be, men are also bullied and ignored when they cannot fend for themselves and when they reach out for help not just regarding physical matters but also psychological aspects as well. In short, should an individual express themselves outside of what is expected of them based on their gender, they will be frowned upon by many, if not the general society.

The movie Enola Holmes has become one of the examples of movies that have become tools to break gender stereotypes and empower both women and men and teach both young and adults that they can be anything or anyone without having to worry about how it affects what others will say because of their gender. Since it had just been released late September of 2020, the newness of the movie as well as its popularity reaching 76 million audience within just a week, the researcher finds it to be the perfect object of study in understanding how a 20th century movie is able to represent gender expression through its characters. In an article written for scotscoop.com, Ebaugh (2020) highlights that the film Enola Holmes "breaks

gender stereotypes "one mystery at a time", as it generally highlights female independence.

1.3 Statement of Problem

The question raised to explore this research based on the background of the study as well as the identification of problem is as follows: How does the film Enola Holmes represent gender expression?

1.4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to apply a semiotic analysis regarding how the movie Enola Holmes illustrates gender through its characters. By doing so, the researcher will be able to evaluate whether the Sherlock Holmes franchise contributes to or instead breaks the existing gender stereotypes in society.

The adventures of Sherlock Holmes is well recognized around the globe both its novels and film, and since its franchise Enola Holmes takes on a different perspective —most visually that of gender, It is important to understand how it portrays its female and male characters differently.

1.5. Significance of the Research

Academic

The researcher will address both the verbal communication as well as non-verbal communication which act as a tool to convey messages about gender, specifically in terms of identity and expression. By analyzing the movie through

semiotics, the researcher hopes it will be of use for future studies since the film industry will continue to grow and will never lose its relevance in terms of reflecting or even challenging the status quo in existing society.

Practical

By understanding the new take on the Sherlock Holmes franchise, the analysis of Enola Holmes regarding gender will have the chance to provide a better understanding of how times are changing and the way movies portray gender and gender roles are doing the same.

1.6. Organization of the Study

CHAPTER I: Introduction

Chapter one will provide a general background of the topic chosen by the researcher. This chapter will include an explanation about the identification of the problem, formulation of the problem, purpose of study, and the significance of the research.

CHAPTER II: Object of Research

In this chapter the subject and object of the research will be discussed and further explained. The subject of this research is a Netflix original movie Enola Holmes. The object of this research will revolve around how the movie Enola Holmes assign gender expression to its characters throughout the film.

CHAPTER III: Literature Review

The third chapter will discuss the concepts and theories which support this study and furthermore give foundation to answer the research question stated in the first chapter. This will include the concept of mass communication, film, representation theory, and gender along with its model of continuum.

CHAPTER IV: Research Methodology

In chapter four will be an explanation about the methodology of the research. In this study, the researcher adopts a qualitative research method. This chapter will be used to explain the very method of data collection, data processing to explain the unit of analysis, both informants and key informants with the limitations experienced by the researcher.

CHAPTER V: Research Findings and Discussion

In the fifth chapter, this research will discuss the collected data and findings based on the obtained data along with the literature review in the third chapter. Moreover, this chapter will discuss and further explain the details which aims to answer the research question.

CHAPTER VI: Conclusion and Suggestion

Finally, this last chapter will serve an overall review on this research, involving conclusion and suggestions to improve the research.